Unequal Housework = Divorce? Couples Housework, Relationship Satisfaction and Dissolution

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Abstract

Equity theory posits that couples' housework allocations have consequences for marital satisfaction and stability. Yet, the lack of couple-level data hinders direct exploration of how inconsistencies in couples' housework reports structure these relationships. We address this limitation by applying Swedish data from the 2009 Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS; n=1,057 couples) to assess whether inequality in housework divisions and mismatches in couples' housework reports structure relationship satisfaction and stability. Matching our sample with Swedish register data (2009-2014), we determine whether unequal housework divisions contribute to relationship dissolution. We find women who report performing the bulk of the housework are less likely to be satisfied with their relationships, and are more likely to consider breaking-up. Men are also less satisfied with their relationships in couples where women report performing the bulk of the housework. These unions are also more likely to dissolve. Using both partners' housework reports, we find relationship satisfaction is lower for couples where one partner is under-benefitted, or both report one partner is doing the bulk of the housework. Yet, the most severe consequences are for housework mismatch, or where the male partner reports sharing equally yet the female partner reports doing more housework, as both partners report lower relationship satisfaction. Women in these partnerships also consider breaking-up, and the unions are more likely to dissolve. Our results identify that housework inequality has serious consequences for relationship quality and stability.

Couples' divisions of household labor have serious consequences for relationship quality. Unequal housework allocations are associated with depression, marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Baxter & Western, 1998; Bird, 1999; Coltrane, 2001; Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Kluwer, Jose, & Van de Vliert, 1996; Yogev & Brett, 1985). The bulk of scholarship on housework relies on single-respondent reports to identify these associations (Bianchi et al., 2000; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Gupta, 2007; Gupta & Ash, 2008; Lively et al., 2008; Lively, Steelman, & Powell, 2010). Yet, couples' housework reports can be inconsistent, which may create interpersonal conflict and deteriorate relationship quality. The impact of housework mismatch, or partners reporting different divisions of labor, remains largely untested. This is explained, in part, by the lack of couple-level data to unpack these processes. Yet, theory predicts these relationships are consequential. Equity theory posits that feeling under and over-benefitted in social exchange fosters emotional distress (Adams, 1965; Carrell & Dittrich, 1978; Hegtvedt, 1990; Pritchard, 1969; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Developed along the social psychological tradition, equity theory is often tested among strangers, identifying the impact of being under and over-benefitted on feelings of injustice (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989; Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). Yet, as Steelman and Powell (1996) argue, equity theory has broad applicability in family scholarship, notably among intimate partners. Indeed, Lively et al. (2010) apply equity theory to a range of negative emotions, identifying that feeling under-benefitted in housework has the greatest impact on feelings of anger, depression and unhappiness, with under-benefitted men reporting greater emotional distress than under-benefitted women (Lively et al., 2008). These studies document the negative emotional consequences of housework inequality, yet they rely on single-respondents reports of partners' housework contributions. We expand upon this research by investigating how inconsistencies in couples' housework

reports structure relationship quality. We estimate relationship experiences across multiple dimensions including relationship quality, break-up plans and relationship dissolution.

Our approach is innovative as we apply couple-level data, allowing us to investigate the dyadic nature of relationship satisfaction. We use couple-level data from the 2009 Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS) to assess how partners' housework reports structure relationship satisfaction for couples in one highly egalitarian context: Sweden. This methodological advance allows us to speak directly to the couple-level component of equity and housework theories, that remain untested in single-respondent studies (Bianchi et al., 2000; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Gupta, 2007; Gupta & Ash, 2008; Lively et al., 2008; Lively et al., 2010). Further, we are able to determine whether unequal housework divisions make relationships less stable, by investigating reports of break-up plans and by following respondents over time. By linking our sample to Swedish register data (2009-2014), we determine whether housework inequality contributes to partnership dissolution. Our modeling strategy identifies that housework inequality and inconsistency in couples' housework reports structure relationship quality, thus building a deeper theoretical understanding of relationship satisfaction and stability.

An Overview of Equity Theory

Equity theory posits feeling over or under-benefitted in a social exchange fosters a negative emotional response (Adams, 1965; Carrell & Dittrich, 1978; Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Pritchard, 1969; Walster et al., 1978). Often tested among strangers, equity theory theorizes inequality – or feeling under and over-benefitted – evokes a sense of injustice (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989; Hegtvedt & Killian, 1999; Krehbiel & Cropanzano, 2000). In response to this distress, individuals work to restore equity through altered cognition, behavior or by terminating the relationship (Adams, 1965). Romantic relationships are often

sites of negotiation and thus the equity perspective has been extended to couples' housework divisions (Steelman & Powell, 1996). For example, Lively et al. (2010) test the impact of housework inequality across a range of negative and positive emotions, and find those who feel their household's division of labor is unfair to them report greater distress, anger, and fear. The authors also find those who feel their housework is unfair *to their spouse* report greater negative emotions across these measures *and* greater self-reproach. Thus, as equity theory predicts, feeling under or over-benefitted in housework divisions contributes to emotional distress. Yet, these studies rely on single respondents' reports and do not test for how respondents' *and* their partners' housework reports structure respondents' emotions. We expect inconsistency in couples' reports, notably feeling under-benefitted and having a spouse discredit one's contribution, will evoke a strong negative response. We extend upon this research by estimating these effects at the couple-level to weigh how respondents' and their partners' reports of being under or over-benefitted in housework impact relationship satisfaction.

Forms of Over- and Under-Benefitting

Couples' housework reports can take multiple forms. On one hand, they may be equivalent, reflecting parity in reports. Parity can include equity and inequity in multiple forms: (1) consistent reports that one spouse is over-benefitted; (2) consistent reports that one spouse is under-benefitted; (3) consistent reports of housework equality. Equity theory posits that unequal housework divisions (under or over-benefit) should deteriorate relationship quality, even when reports are consistent across couples. Based on this theory, we expect relationships that report one partner is either under or over-benefitting to report lower levels of relationship satisfaction than those who both report parity between household labor. Alternatively, couples' reports may be inconsistent, capturing disparity. Disparity can take multiple forms including those that discredit the others' housework contribution (e.g. both

respondents report doing the most housework or one reports sharing, yet the other reports doing more) or credit each other's housework (e.g. one reports sharing equally but the other reports his/her partner does more). While these combinations may take multiple forms, equity theory is clear – inequality should be negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). Thus, from equity theory, we develop our first hypothesis:

Equity Theory

H1: Respondents who report being under or over-benefitted in housework will report lower relationship satisfaction than those who both report sharing housework equally.

The Link to Gender: Gender Display

The emotional consequences of housework inequality are not gender neutral. Rather, men who feel under-benefitted in housework report greater emotional distress than do women (Lively et al., 2008). Yet, the equity perspective does not adequately theorize gendered relationships (see (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987) for a discussion of equity sensitivity on the impact of personal preferences). We fill this gap by applying the gender display perspective to account for the gendered nature of housework divisions. Rooted in the symbolic interactionist perspective, the gender display theory identifies men and women's reliance on cultural scripts to display and reinforce gender identities through an interactive process (actor and audience) (Goffman, 1959, 1979; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Separate spheres ideologies emphasize women's responsibility for the private sphere, of which housework and childcare is one domain (Ferree, 1990). It follows that women who report performing the bulk of the housework are enacting, at least partially, gendered scripts. Yet, whether their partner, or the audience, recognizes these contributions identifies housework as an interactive process and presents a point for interpersonal conflict. For some, the display

and response are consistent, capturing gender display (both agree the woman does more), gender equality (both agree they share equally) or gender atypical displays (both agree the man does more). Yet, others have inconsistent reports (e.g. we share equally; I do more) as the couples may be applying divergent scripts or they may be missing each other's performance (see Table 1 presented for the woman's perspective; viewing it from the man's perspective would reverse our expectations)

Table 1: Economy of Credit/Discredit Overview: Identifying the Role of Gender in Parity and Disparity

Husbands' Reports	Wives' Reports		
	I do more	We share equally	Partner does more
I do more	Discredit	Discredit	Gender Atypical Display
We share equally	Discredit	Gender Equality	Credit
Partner does more	Gender Display	Credit	Credit

The question remains as to how these disparities impact relationship satisfaction. In her seminal piece (Hochschild, 1989) identifies the economy of gratitude whereby housework is a "gift" given from one spouse to another; expressing gratitude for housework improves relationship quality. Accordingly, unequal divisions of housework, when recognized with gratitude, are less damaging to relationship quality (Hochschild, 1989). Yet, gratitude may be only one piece of this relationship puzzle. As such, we extend this perspective to an economy of credit/discredit, or the extent to which one spouse credits or discredits the other's housework contributions. We expect couples that discredit each other's housework contributions to report lower relationship satisfaction than those who credit each other's contributions. At the extremes, we expect couples where both report performing the majority

of the housework (discredit) to report the lowest relationship satisfaction, and those where both report the other does more housework (credit) to report higher relationship satisfaction. In between these extremes, we expect those who discredit the other spouses' contribution (e.g. one reporting sharing and the other doing the bulk of the housework) to report lower relationship quality than the equal sharers or the creditors.

We also expect the consequences of discrediting to be most severe for women's relationship satisfaction. Women consistently perform the bulk of the household chores, even in highly egalitarian countries like Sweden (Bernhardt, Noack, & Lyngstad, 2008; Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Fuwa, 2004; Geist, 2005). This inequality may create deeper feelings of resentment for Swedish women who expect egalitarian housework arrangements (Bernhardt, Noack, & Lyngstad, 2008). Indeed, inconsistencies in one's desired and actual housework arrangements increase the risk of divorce for Swedish couples (Olàh & Gähler, 2012). What remains untested, however, is how *inconsistencies* in couples' housework reports, notably men discounting women's housework contributions, impacts relationship satisfaction. Across a range of studies and nations, women consistently report spending more time in housework than do men (see Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010 for review) Applying gendered scripts, women often justify these unequal divisions as a means to exhibit "care" in heterosexual unions, which explains why many women view unequal housework divisions as fair (Thompson, 1991). The consequences of housework inequality are less damaging to relationship satisfaction when male partners express gratitude (Hochschild, 1989). Yet, less is known about the consequences of men discounting these large and symbolic contributions. We expect discrediting women's housework contributions will increase women's feelings of resentment and hostility thus deteriorating relationship quality. We directly test these relationships through couple-level data, extending the literature beyond single-respondent reports. From this, we develop our next hypotheses:

Couple-Level Economy of Credit/Discredit

H2: Respondents who credit their spouse's housework contributions will report better and those who discredit their spouses' housework contributions will report worse relationship satisfaction.

H2b: These relationships will be stronger for women than for men.

Housework Inequality and Relationship Dissolution

Housework inequality may have long-term consequences on relationship stability, notably increasing the odds of dissolving the union. Previous research documents that inconsistencies in one's *ideal* housework expectations and *actual* housework divisions increases the risk for divorce (Olàh & Gähler, 2012). Yet, less is known about how inconsistencies in partners' housework reports contribute to union dissolution. Equity theory argues those experiencing the most distress alter cognition, change behavior or terminate the relationship to mitigate this distress (Adams, 1965). Additional research shows inequity is a better predictor of relationship satisfaction than vice versa, with long-term effects (Van Yperen & Buunk, 1990). This research indicates the stress of inequality jeopardizes relationship stability. Yet, whether equity theory replicates in intimate partnerships, where investments are greater than among strangers, requires additional investigation. To this end, we explore two dimensions of relationship stability: whether the respondent considered breaking-up and whether the partnership is terminated. We expect the relationships to be consistent with our previous hypotheses and thus discuss our expectations briefly below.

Based on equity theory, we expect those who are under or over-benefitted in housework to report relationship dissatisfaction and thus desire to dissolve the union. Indeed, unequal divisions of, and conflict over, housework are shown to contribute to lower relationship satisfaction and separation (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Piña & Bengtson, 1993;

Yogev & Brett, 1985). We expect women to be more likely to consider breaking-up when they report performing the majority of the housework, and when their partners discredit their contributions (e.g. male partner reports he does more or they share; female partner reports doing more). We expect these effects to be significant for considering breaking-up, for which the threat point is lower than relationship dissolution. According to equity theory, "leaving the field" is often the last resort (Adams, 1965) and thus we expect housework inequality to be weaker predictors of relationship dissolution. Indeed, respondents are more likely to resolve inequity by changing their perceptions by cognitively distorting each person's inputs and outputs, encouraging one's partner to change his/her behaviors or changing one's own behaviors (Adams, 1965; Pritchard, 1969). Given that cognitive dissidence and behavioral alternations are more common than relationship dissolution, we expect inequality to be stronger predictors of break-up plans than actual relationship dissolution. Yet, as the equity theory predicts, inequity in housework should contribute to relationship dissolution. Thus, we expect inequality in housework to have serious consequences for relationship stability.

THE CASE FOR SWEDEN

The application of Swedish data has important consequences for our hypothesized relationships. Sweden is one of the most gender empowered nations in the world (United Nations Development Report, 2013). Discussions about gender equality are central in public debates and Swedish welfare policies are expansive, aimed at reducing gender gaps in employment and household responsibilities (Fuwa & Cohen, 2007; Gornick & Meyers, 2003; Leira, 1993). For example, parental leave policies mandate a fathers' quota to encourage shared parenting and, as a consequence, men account for a larger housework share (Geist, 2005; Hook, 2006; Pettit & Hook, 2009). Further, supported by generous welfare state

benefits, Swedish women are more likely to challenge unequal housework divisions (Ruppanner, 2010, 2012). Swedes stand out relative to other Scandinavian countries, as young Swedish couples expect more equal housework divisions than their Norwegian counterparts (Bernhardt et al., 2008). As leader in gender equality, inequality in housework should be particularly damaging in the Swedish context (Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Nordenmark & Nyman, 2004; Olàh & Gähler, 2012). Further, Swedes may be more likely to dissolve unequal partnerships given the strong ideological support for equality and generous welfare state benefits for independent households (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Thus, investigating the Sweden provides an important case for understanding these relationships.

Data

Analyses are performed using data from the 2009 wave of the Young Adult Panel Study (YAPS, www.suda.su.se/yaps). The YAPS is a three wave panel with surveys in 1999, 2003 and 2009 of respondents born in 1968, 1972, 1976 and 1980. Three groups of respondents are sampled; Swedish born individuals with Swedish born parents, Swedish born individuals with Turkish born parents and Swedish born individuals with Polish born parents. In 2009, all respondents who had participated in any of the previous waves (1999 or 2003), where again contacted to participate in a final wave of the survey, and for the first time they were also asked to give their cohabiting or married partner a questionnaire. Out of the 1,528 respondents who participated and who were married or cohabiting at the time of the survey, 1,074, or 70 percent, had participating partners. Given our interest in couple-level dynamics, we apply data from this final 2009 wave which, after excluding respondents in same sex relations, produced 1,058 couple dyads for our analysis.

Using the YAPS, we examine two outcomes: (1) relationship satisfaction; and (2) break-up plans. We structure the data at the couple-level so that analyses distinguish between

the man and the woman in each couple. To assess relationship termination, we match respondents from the YAPS with Swedish register data (2009 to 2014) to assess a third outcome: (3) relationship dissolution. The register data, attached to identification codes, is collected by the Swedish government and captures respondents' major life transitions (marriage, birth, and divorce). Our unique data design allows us to determine whether both partners' attitudes and reported behavior, collected in 2009, result in union dissolution between 2009 and 2014, as discussed in more detail below.

To analyze the data, we perform five sets of logistic regressions on each of the three outcomes (the man's and the woman's relationship satisfaction, the man's and the woman's break-up plans and the couple's relationship dissolution). This couple-level approach enables us to assess not only how, for instance, the man's reported sharing affect *his* relationship satisfaction, but also how it affects his the relationship satisfaction of his partner.[1]

Dependent Variables

Relationship satisfaction is measured by the question: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your relationship with your partner?" Responses are on a five point scale: (1) "very dissatisfied"; (2) "somewhat dissatisfied"; (3) "neither dissatisfied nor satisfied"; (4) "somewhat satisfied"; and (5) "very satisfied". In initial analyses, we explored the distribution of respondents by relationship satisfaction (Table 1). We found most respondents report satisfaction with their relationship (90.2% of men and 88.9% of women report being somewhat or very satisfied). When coded as *very satisfied*, we find a different pattern with

[1] An alternate approach would have been to perform seemingly unrelated regressions on the woman's outcomes and the man's outcomes, in order to adjust for any correlation in the error terms between the woman and the man in the couple. Note however that if both models have the same set of independent variables (as is the case here) the results from a seemingly unrelated regression (in terms of coefficients and standard errors) are the same as if we estimate the models separately (Stata 2013), which is why we keep our more intuitive modeling strategy.

roughly 60% of men and women falling within this group. Given our interest in those with the greatest relationship stability, we apply the measure for those who are *very satisfied* dichotomously coded. Note that our results remain robust if we instead perform OLS-regressions including the full five-point scale outcome.

Break-up plans are measured by the question: "Have you or your partner considered ending the relationship during the last year?" Main respondents and partners chose between pre-defined alternatives: (1) Yes, we both have; (2) I think my partner has, but I haven't; (3) Yes, I have but I don't think my partner has; and (4) No. Our break-up measure captures those who report that they themselves have considered breaking up (values 1 or 3). In sensitivity tests we also ran the models including respondents who reported only their partner had considered breaking up in the group who are considered to have had break-up plans (values 1, 2 or 3); the results are equivalent. Thus, for ease in understanding, our dependent variable reflects the respondent's own thoughts of considering breaking up (value = 1) or not (value =0).

Actual break-up is estimated by linking data derived from registers on civil status changes. For married couples we estimate break-up by whether a divorce has taken place after the survey (2009-2014). For cohabiting couples, we can only estimate break-up if the partners have at least one common child in 2009. For these couples, break-up is estimated as whether the partners no longer live in the same property (fastighet) in 2014. Cohabiting individuals with no common children are excluded from analyses on actual break-up. As indicated in Table 1, only a small segment of our sample terminated their relationship during this time period (12.6%). However, the data limitations underestimate union dissolution, especially

among the most vulnerable couples. Thus, our models likely underestimate the true effects without the non-parent cohabiting couples.

Table 2: Distribution of Dependent Measures

	Men (%)	Women (%)
Relationship satisfaction (5 vs. 1-4)	59.6	62.7
Relationship satisfaction (4-5 vs. 1-3)	90.2	88.9
Break-up plans	14.8	17.9
Actual break up of couple 2009- Dec 2014 (n=803, couple level measure)	12.6	

The sampling of only married respondents in the dissolution models may introduce bias into our models. To determine whether the different sampling frames (cohabiting and married versus married and cohabiting with child only) biased our results, we also estimated our YAPS models (relationship satisfaction and break-up plans) excluding those cohabiting individuals with no common children; the results are largely equivalent. In the restricted model, we gain and loose some marginal significant effects ($p<0.10$). Yet, the restriction in sample size (excluding cohabiters without children reduce our sample size by 20%) limits the power of our models. Further, the exclusion of this theoretically relevant sample limits the generalizability of relationship experiences for these cohorts of young Swedes for whom cohabitation is a normative relationship stage. Thus, we estimate these models with slightly different samples. But, the results excluding cohabiting respondents without residential children are presented in the appendix (A and B).

Main Independent Variables

Gendered division of housework is derived from the question: "How do you [and your partner] divide housework?" with pre-defined alternatives: (1) I do the most; (2) we share equally; (3) my partner does the most. We investigate these measures for the respondent and partners' reports alone (table 3) and for mismatch in couples' reports (table 4).

Individual Controls

We control for *gender attitudes* of the respondent and his/her partner through the following measure: (1) "A society where men and women are equal is a good society"; (2) "Men can do as well as women in caring jobs"; (3) "Women can do as well as men in technical jobs"; (4) It is as important for a woman as for a man to support herself; (5) Men can be as good as women at housework. Responses are on a five-point scale with higher values reflecting more egalitarian gender role ideology. As most Swedes report high normative gender egalitarianism, we identified our gender attitudes measure through multiple steps. First, we identified measures that produced the highest internal consistency; these measures produce an alpha of 0.71. Then, we recoded our gender attitude measure so that egalitarian respondents are those who reported the maximum values (value = 5) on all of these questions to be consistent with previous research (Oläh & Gähler, 2012). Our traditional respondents are those with a mixing of values on these measures. We also control for a number of confounding characteristics that stabilize marriages including the presence of a child, income and duration of partnership (Belsky 1990; Waite and Lillard 1991). *The length of the union* is measured in months at the time of the 2009 survey, calculated from the year and month the respondent reported their relationship started. *Income* is individually reported by each respondent in 2009, as their crude income before taxes but after the deduction of social-insurance fees. The presence of *children in the household* is included as a combined variable of the presence and age of children living in the household in five categories: (1) no child in the household, (2) youngest child in the household is 0-2 years old, (3) youngest child in the

household is 3-6 years old, (4) youngest child in the household is 7-12 years old, and (5) youngest child in the household is 13 years or older. Those without a child in the home serve as our reference group. From register data we derive information on whether the couple is in a *cohabiting* or *marital union* (reference group), dichotomously coded. The birth year of the woman and man is included as categorical variables distinguishing between being born (1) 1968 or earlier (*comparative group*), (2) 1969-1972, (3) 1973-1976, and (4) 1977 or later. *Ethnic background* is measured for the respondent and distinguishes between (1) Swedish born to two Swedish parents, (2) Swedish born to at least one Polish parent, and (3) Swedish born to at least one Turkish parent. Finally, we include a measure of self-reported *work status* to distinguish between (1) full-time, at least 30 hours per week, (2) part-time, 10-29 hours per week, (3) on parental leave, (4) student, and (5) other. Full-time workers serve as our comparative group. Appendix C presents the descriptive statistics for our measures.

Results

Table 3 provides the odds ratios for reporting very high relationship satisfaction, having had break-up plans during the last year, and ending the relationship between 2009 and 2014. All of the models include the full-set of individual-level controls. In exploratory analyses, we also estimated the models including only native-born Swedes with Swedish parents which produced equivalent results. Thus, our models include the full-sample as second-generation immigrant groups are not driving these effects. Table 3 includes the respondents' and their spouses' own housework reports for all three of our dependent variables. In testing the equity perspective, we find limited support. We find men's reports of being under or over-benefitted in housework have no impact on men's relationship satisfaction (model 1), break-up plans (model 3) or relationship dissolution (model 5). When men report their female partner does more housework, women are more satisfied with their relationship (model 2) and are less likely to dissolve the union (model 5), lending support for

the economy of gratitude. This suggests these crediting relationships are more satisfying and stable than egalitarian partnerships. While men's housework reports have little impact on either partner's relationship quality, we find women's reports of being under-benefitted are negatively associated with both partners' relationship satisfaction (models 1 and 2). This indicates that inequality does not have gender neutral consequences with women's under-benefitting reports, not men's, structuring both partners' relationship quality. Yet, the consequences of feeling under-benefitted for women are more severe than for men as these women are more likely to consider breaking-up (model 4) and these unions are more likely to dissolve (model 5). This suggests that consequences of housework inequality are serious for partnerships where women are under-benefitted.

Table 4 adds mismatches in couples' reports to test the economies of credit/debit. We begin with couples with consistent housework reports. In gender atypical couples, or those where the both partners report the husband does more housework, men report lower relationship satisfaction (model 1) and both partners consider breaking-up (models 3 and 4). These relationships are no more likely to dissolve than their equal sharing counterparts (model 5), but our results suggest the quality of these partnerships are lower. Among gender traditionals, or those where both partners report the wife does more housework, men and women's relationship satisfaction is lower (models 1 and 2) but this inequality has no impact on break-up plans (models 3 and 4) or relationship dissolution (model 5). Consistent with the equity perspective, our results indicate that being under-benefitted in the partnership jeopardizes relationship quality with important gender differences. We now turn to mismatches in couples' housework reports which we expect to have the strongest effects on relationship quality and stability. Among discrediting couples, we find both partners are less satisfied with their relationships when their husband reports they share, but the wife reports she does more housework (models 1 and 2), a finding consistent with our economy of debit

expectations. This form of discrediting also increases the odds that women consider breaking-up (model 4) and these unions are more likely to dissolve (model 5). Men in discrediting unions, or where he reports spending more but she reports sharing housework equally, also consider breaking-up more often than equitable sharers (model 3) but these unions are no more likely to dissolve (model 5). These results indicate that discrediting one's partner housework threatens relationship quality and, when men discredit women's household labor, jeopardizes stability. In support of the economy of credit, we find women are more likely to be satisfied with their relationship when their spouse credits their housework contribution, or when he reports she does more but she reports they share (model 2). Collectively, these results indicate that mismatch in couples' housework reports structure relationship quality and stability.

Conclusion

This paper explores how couples' housework allocations and inconsistencies in housework reports structure marital satisfaction, break-up plans and relationship dissolution. Our results point to the serious consequences of housework inequality. Relying on each partners' reports, we find women's reports of unequal housework divisions are associated with lower relationship quality for both partners. For women, their greater housework burden has more dire consequences, contributing to break-up plans and relationship dissolution. When we estimate the relationships for mismatch in partners' reports we find discrediting relationships, or those in which the husband reports they share equally yet the wife reports she does the most, are the lowest quality and most unstable. Across these main findings, we build a deeper theoretical understanding of housework, equity and relationship quality.

According to the equity perspective, feeling under-benefitted in domestic arrangements has negative emotional consequences (Adams, 1965). Equity theory is gender

neutral, assuming inequity should equally structure men and women's feelings of injustice. We find some support for the equity perspective but these relationships are highly gendered, hinging on women's housework reports. For example, male and female partners are less satisfied with their relationship when women report performing the largest share of the housework. For women, these experiences are detrimental for relationship stability, contributing to women's plans to break-up and, following these respondents over time, these unions are more likely to dissolve. This suggests that equity theory doesn't adequately explain the highly gendered housework experience. Our results suggest that couples' relationship dissatisfaction is dependent on women's unequal housework arrangements. The implications of this finding are serious as women are consistently shown to perform more housework even in these highly gender equal countries, like Sweden (Bernhardt et al., 2008; Evertsson & Nermo, 2004; Fuwa, 2004; Geist, 2005). Our results suggest that this inequality, which is enduring over time, has serious consequences for relationship stability in Sweden. The replicability of this finding in other countries would add nuance to this finding. But, our results are clear and important: women's larger housework share contributes to relationship dissolution.

In addition to each partners' reports, we also estimate the impact of mismatched housework reports on relationship quality. To capture this process, we weighed the gender display perspective which identifies housework as means to enact cultural scripts of femininity within heterosexual unions (Goffman, 1959, 1979; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Developed along the symbolic interactionist perspective, the gender display perspective identifies an actor, here the person doing the housework, and an audience, here the partner receiving the performance (Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Our couple-level data allows us to weigh how inconsistencies in couples' housework reports structure relationship satisfaction, break-up plans and relationship dissolution. We expected that those whose

housework was discredited by their partners would report the lowest relationship satisfaction and the least stable unions, with stronger effects for women than men. Our results support this claim. We find couples where the man reports sharing the housework yet the woman states she does more, both partners are less satisfied with the relationship and women in these partnerships are more likely to consider breaking-up; these unions are also more likely to dissolve. In fact, these are the only unions that are more likely to disband than egalitarian unions.

These results support the economy of credit/discredit perspective. In her seminal work, Hochschild (1989) documents an economy of gratitude through which appreciation of women's greater housework contributions helps buffer couples from the destabilizing effects of housework inequality on relationship stability. We extend this theory to include an economy of credit/discredit, specifying the impact of crediting versus discrediting one's partner's housework on relationship quality. We find women's relationship satisfaction is greater in partnerships where their male partner reports she does more of the housework, crediting her housework contribution. This is true for men's own reports and for couples where the female partner reports they share equally but the male partner reports she does more. This supports an economy of gratitude perspective, identified in previous research (Hochschild, 1989). Our results indicate that just as discounting women's housework arrangements can jeopardize couples' relationships, crediting women's housework contributions can improve relationship quality.

So what types of lessons can be learned from this research? We find unequal housework arrangements, especially those that disadvantage women, are associated with lower relationship quality and increased relationship fragility. This indicates inequality in housework has serious consequences above and beyond relationship dissatisfaction. These experiences are compounded by discrediting behaviors, as couples where women's

housework contributions are minimized are the least stable. Collectively, our results indicate that women's disproportionate housework shares have serious consequences for relationship quality, with important couple effects. These dyadic relationships are masked by single-respondent studies and indicate that, as family scholars have long argued, unequal housework divisions have serious consequences for relationship stability (Berk, 1985; Gupta, 1999; Baxter & Western, 1998; Bird, 1999; Coltrane, 2001; Ferree, 1990; Glass & Fujimoto, 1994; Hochschild, 1989; Kluwer et al., 1996; Yogev & Brett, 1985)

While the results are quite provocative, this study is not without limitations. A major limitation is the application of data from a single, highly gender egalitarian nation. The question remains as to whether these findings are replicable in other nations. It may be that in the highly egalitarian context of Sweden, unequal divisions of housework are grounds for divorce and thus our findings are country-specific. Yet, it is reasonable to expect that these relationships may be more consequential in nations with limited public transfers for women and families. In a highly individualistic nation like the United States, for example, the compounding pressures of childcare *and* housework may intensify feelings of injustice and risks for divorce. This may, in part, explain the high divorce rate for couples in the United States. Future research should apply couple-level data to investigate these relationships. A second limitation relates to the application of Swedish Register data. Coupling the YAPS with these data is a major methodological break-through, yet the limitations of the Swedish register, notably that data are not collected for cohabiting couples without children, limits the generalizability of our findings. Notably, cohabiters have less stable relationships than couples that are married, even in Sweden (Andersson & Philipov 2002), and inequality in housework may contribute to separation. Our models cannot assess these relationships. Further, the 2014 Swedish register data may not provide a long enough timeline for

relationship dissolution across multiple groups. Following these respondents over the duration of the relationship should indicate long-term patterns.

In light of these limitations, the contributions of this research are clear. Our results indicate that inequality in housework has serious consequences for relationship quality and stability. We find women's housework reports drive these relationships, with important consequences for men's relationship satisfaction and women's relationship commitment. Mismatch in couples' housework reports, especially when men discount women's contributions, increase the risk of divorce. Ultimately, our results indicate that housework inequality has detrimental consequences on relationship stability indicating increased importance of men's equal contributions.

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Table 3. Self-Reported Housework, Relationship Satisfaction, Break-Up Intention and Relationship Dissolution (2009 YAPS; Swedish Register Data)

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship Dissolution
		Man Model 1	Woman Model 2	Man Model 3	Woman Model 4	Model 5
Equity						
Man	I do the most	-0.48	-0.47	0.68	0.31	-0.57
	We share equally (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	My partner does the most	0.25	0.49**	-0.20	-0.07	-0.67*
Woman	I do the most	-0.61***	-0.92***	0.06	0.46*	0.78**
	We share equally (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	My partner does the most	-0.21	0.13	0.27	0.59	-0.12
Gender Role Ideology						
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.38**	-0.14	0.13	0.21	0.34
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	0.09	-0.06	0.04	0.34*	-0.10
Stabilizing Characteristics						
Length of partnership (2003)		0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.01*
Man's income per 1.000 SEK		-0.10*	0.00	0.09	-0.02	-0.16*
Woman's income per 1.000 SEK		0.00	-0.06	0.02	-0.05	0.10
Presence of Children (compared to no child present)						
- Child under 3 present		-0.14	-0.18	-0.45	-0.63*	0.20
- Child 3 to 6 present		-0.71***	-0.58**	0.43	0.33	0.70
- Child 7 to 12 present		-0.18	0.01	0.98**	0.34	0.80
- Child 13 plus present		0.50	0.54	0.72	0.29	1.18
Destabilizing Characteristics						
Cohabiting (compared to Married)		-0.57***	-0.58***	0.81***	0.50*	0.49*
Controls						
Man's year of birth						
-1968 (ref.)		--	--	--	--	--
1969-72		0.31	0.09	-0.23	-0.02	0.15
1973-76		0.13	0.14	-0.15	0.03	0.35
1977-		0.69*	0.28	-0.07	-0.15	0.11
Woman's year of birth						
-1968 (ref.)		--	--	--	--	--
1969-72		0.31	0.09	-0.23	-0.02	0.15
1973-76		0.13	0.14	-0.15	0.03	0.35
1977-		0.69*	0.28	-0.07	-0.15	0.11
Ethnicity (compared to Swedish)						
- Polish		-0.19	-0.26	0.75*	0.56*	-0.01
- Turkish		-0.50	-0.47	0.28	0.46	-0.90
Man's work Status (compared to Full-time)						
- Part-time		-0.99	-0.11	0.44	-0.69	-0.51
- Parental leave		-1.34**	-0.50	-0.09	-0.27	-0.88
- Student		-0.06	-0.22	1.66**	0.06	-0.32
- Other		0.22	-0.33	0.44	0.33	0.17
Woman's work Status (compared to Full-time)						
- Part-time		-0.01	-0.09	0.08	0.15	0.10
- Parental leave		0.16	0.19	-0.22	-0.31	-0.47
- Student		-0.16	-0.63	-0.13	0.31	1.09*
- Other		-0.45	-0.19	0.69*	-0.01	0.99*
Intercept		1.46**	1.57***	-3.05***	-1.69**	-1.93*
N		1049	1055	1041	1050	789

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table 4. Between Couple Housework Parity, Relationship Satisfaction and Break-Up Intention Reports for Couples (2009 YAPS; Swedish Register Data)

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention		Relationship Dissolution
		Man	Woman	Man	Woman	
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Parity/Disparity						
Man*Woman						
Parity	Share equally (ref.)	---	--	--	--	--
	Both report husband does the most	-0.88*	-0.41	1.20*	1.10*	0.22
	Both report wife does the most	-0.34*	-0.43*	-0.11	0.38	0.09
Disparity	Husband does most; Wife does most	-1.46	-0.91	0.00	-0.17	0.00
(Discredit)	Husband does most; Share equally	-0.34	-0.40	1.10*	0.07	-0.81
	Share equally; Wife does most	-0.76***	-0.83***	0.34	0.54*	0.96**
Disparity	Share equally; Husband does the most	-0.21	0.12	0.30	0.49	---
(Credit)	Wife does most; we share equally	-0.04	0.64*	0.07	0.08	-0.36
	Wife does the most; Husband does the most	---	---	---	---	---
Gender Role Ideology						
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.39**	-0.15	0.17	0.24	0.35
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	0.08	-0.05	0.05	0.35*	-0.11
Stabilizing Characteristics						
Length of partnership (2003)		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.01*
Man's income per 1.000 SEK		-0.10*	0.00	0.10	-0.02	-0.15
Woman's income per 1.000 SEK		0.00	-0.06	0.02	-0.06	0.09
Presence of Children (compared to no child present)						
- Child under 3 present		-0.16	-0.19	-0.47	-0.63*	0.22
- Child 3 to 6 present		-0.70***	-0.59**	0.47	0.33	0.74
- Child 7 to 12 present		-0.21	0.00	1.04**	0.38	0.84
- Child 13 plus present		0.43	0.53	0.79	0.32	1.25
Destabilizing Characteristics						
Cohabiting (compared to Married)		-0.56***	-0.59***	0.83***	0.52**	0.52*
Controls						
Man's year of birth						
-1968 (ref.)		--	--	--	--	--
1969-72		0.28	0.36	0.10	0.12	0.00
1973-76		0.15	0.11	0.45	0.03	0.13
1977-		0.31	0.65*	0.34	-0.34	-0.52
Woman's year of birth						
-1968 (ref.)		--	--	--	--	--
1969-72		0.30	0.09	-0.24	0.00	0.17
1973-76		0.11	0.13	-0.12	0.05	0.35
1977-		0.66*	0.29	-0.05	-0.13	0.14
Ethnicity (compared to Swedish)						
- Polish		-0.19	-0.25	0.72*	0.55	0.01
- Turkish		-0.45	-0.43	0.24	0.39	-0.85
Man's work Status (compared to Full-time)						
- Part-time		-0.98	-0.09	0.44	-0.72	-0.50
- Parental leave		-1.33**	-0.48	-0.07	-0.28	-0.88
- Student		-0.04	-0.23	1.88***	0.14	-0.41
- Other		0.22	-0.33	0.49	0.35	0.10
Woman's work Status (compared to Full-time)						
- Part-time		-0.01	-0.09	0.03	0.14	0.06
- Parental leave		0.16	0.17	-0.21	-0.30	-0.47
- Student		-0.14	-0.64	-0.08	0.31	1.01*
- Other		-0.44	-0.20	0.72*	-0.04	1.04*

Intercept	1.54**	1.54**	-3.25***	-1.79**	-2.10*
N	1048	1054	1033	1056	768

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Appendix

Appendix A. Housework Parity, Relationship Satisfaction and Break-Up Intention Reports for Couples (Break up-sample)

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention	
		Man Model 1	**Woman Model 2**	**Man Model 3**	**Woman Model 4**
Parity/Disparity Man*Woman					
Parity	Share equally (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	Both report husband does the most	-0.50	0.71	1.10	0.14
	Both report wife does the most	-0.39*	-0.45*	0.32	0.45
Disparity (Discredit)	Husband does most; Wife does most	-2.01	-0.54	0.00	0.39
	Husband does most; Share equally	-0.28	-0.77	1.63**	0.47
	Share equally; Wife does most	-0.70**	-0.75**	0.73*	0.57
Disparity (Credit)	Share equally; Husband does the most	-0.02	0.71*	0.55	0.41
	Wife does most; we share equally	0.28	0.51	-0.20	0.14
	Wife does the most; Husband does the most	---	---	---	---
Gender Role Ideology					
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.38*	-0.07	0.08	0.25
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.01	-0.13	-0.12	0.50*
Intercept		0.80	1.06	3.01***	-1.19
N		798	802	783	792

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All of the models control for the complete set of individual controls including: length of union (since 2009). income (men and women's). number of children in the home. age (men and women's). ethnic background (Swedish. Polish or Turkish). employment status (men and women's).

Appendix B. Self-Reported Housework, Relationship Satisfaction and Break-Up Intention (Break-up sample)

		Relationship satisfaction		Break-up intention	
		Man Model 1	**Woman Model 2**	**Man Model 3**	**Woman Model 4**
Equity					
Man	I do the most	-0.52	-0.47	0.90	0.43
	We share equally (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	My partner does the most	0.18	0.46*	0.05	0.08
Woman	I do the most	-0.60**	-0.88***	0.18	0.32
	We share equally (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	My partner does the most	0.20	0.95	-0.12	-0.21
Gender Role Ideology					
Man	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.38*	-0.06	0.03	0.23
Woman	Egalitarian (ref.)	--	--	--	--
	Traditional	-0.01	-0.15	-0.11	0.51*
Intercept		0.76	1.12	-2.70**	-1.09
N		798	802	789	786

Note: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001. All of the models control for the complete set of individual controls including: length of union (since 2009). income (men and women's). number of children in the home. age (men and women's). ethnic background (Swedish. Polish or Turkish). employment status (men and women's).

Appendix C. Descriptive statistics: Variable distributions of all variables (n: 1057 men and women)

Variable	Percentages
Length of union in 2009 (months. mean)	102.7
Man's income	
Missing	0.66
<100 000 sek	2.55
100 000-150 000 sek	2.08
150 000-200 000 sek	3.6
200 000-250 000 sek	10.79
250 000- 300 000 sek	18.73
300 000-400 000 sek	32.73
400 000-500 000 sek	15.14
>500 000 sek	13.72
Woman's income	
Missing	0.85
<100 000 sek	9.27
100 000-150 000 sek	9.46
150 000-200 000 sek	11.64
200 000-250 000 sek	19.58
250 000- 300 000 sek	22.33
300 000-400 000 sek	18.26
400 000-500 000 sek	6.24
>500 000 sek	2.37
Children in household	
No child	29.14
0-2 years	27.91
3-6 years	25.92
7-12 years	13.15
13+years	3.88
Marital status	
Married	51.66
Cohabiting	48.34
Birthyear of man	
<1968	25.64
1969-1972	27.63
1973-1976	28.38
1977+	18.35
Birthyear of woman	
<1968	17.22
1969-1972	24.22
1973-1976	28.1
1977+	30.46
Ethnic background. respondent	
Swedish	88.17

Polish	8.61
Turkish	3.22
Man's work status	
Full time. 30 hrs+	89.21
Part time. 10-29 hrs	1.42
Parental leave	2.18
Student	1.7
Other	5.49
Woman's work status	
Full time. 30 hrs+	68.12
Part time. 10-29 hrs	7.47
Parental leave	11.73
Student	4.92
Other	7.76